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Bernard of Clairvaux as Luther's Source:

Reading Bernard with Luther's "Spectacles"

Franz Posset

The nine hundredth birthday of Bernard of Clairvaux, celebrated in 1990, is a good occasion to call to mind this French medieval master's achievement and his impact on the German Reformer Martin Luther. Bernard deserves to be re-introduced to Christian spirituality today, because he is one of the greatest spiritual authors of the church universal. His greatness was recognized and valued by Luther. The Reformer's numerous references to Bernard testify to his high esteem for Bernard as a great witness to the evangelical truth, and they show simultaneously Luther's close familiarity with this last of the church fathers and the greatest representative of monastic theology.

The celebration of Bernard's nine hundredth birthday gives us the occasion to point out Bernard's general importance not only for the Roman Catholic Church, but also for the churches of the Reformation. Besides, there is another specifically theological reason for celebrating Bernard's birthday. It is his ecumenical significance for genuine Christian theology as such. A close scrutiny of Bernard's writings and of Luther's works reveals a striking congeniality of these two giants in the history of Christendom, an affinity to such a degree that previous generations of Lutheran scholars could view Bernard as the forerunner of Protestantism. This ecumenical perspective needs to be pointed out again today, although not necessarily in the same manner. Historically speaking, it would be more accurate to think of Luther's Bernardine outlook in terms of a *filiation bernardienne*.¹ Thus, by going back to the original Luther and to the original Bernard, a common theological ground can be established, or further secured, for the future of theology—and with an ecumenical accent at that.

It remains remarkable that in previous centuries people made more of the congeniality between Luther and Bernard than is generally done today. For instance, the oldest Protestant ecclesiastical history, the *Magdeburg Centuries*, reserved a special place of honor for the Cistercian abbot of Clairvaux. And Luther's old foe, Erasmus of Rotterdam, also went on record with the observation that the Reformer's teaching went back to Bernard (and Augustine).² Keeping

these hints in mind, Luther may be our guide not only to the thought-world of Bernard, but also to a future ecumenical theology grounded in pre-scholastic theology. The purpose of this study is to uncover some of Bernard's thoughts which served as a source of Luther's spirituality and theology and to learn from Bernard what Luther learned for his teaching and preaching in the Reformation. In order to regain access to Bernard as a teacher not only of Martin Luther but of all Christians today, I want to invite the reader to focus with me—using Luther's "eye-glasses"—on those texts from the large body of Bernard's writings which Luther employed in his preaching and teaching.

We must be selective because Luther's references to Bernard amount to more than five hundred, not counting allusions made in his table-talk and in his correspondence. Before going into greater detail on the congeniality of Bernard and Luther, it is fitting to review at least briefly the life and works of Bernard. We can intersperse with these biographical data some observations on Luther's use or neglect of certain Bernardine writings.

I. *Bernard and Luther*

We focus on the preaching, theologizing, and praying Bernard because this focus corresponds to Luther's view of the great pre-scholastic teacher of the church. Luther spoke often and most admiringly of him: "I love Bernard as the one who among all writers preached Christ most charmingly [*auff das aller lieblichste*]. I follow him wherever he preached Christ, and I pray to Christ in the faith in which he prayed to Christ."³ "Bernard is golden when he teaches and preaches."⁴ "Bernard with his preaching excels all other doctors including even Augustine."⁵ To Luther it was a joy to listen to Bernard's "fine preaching."⁶ Apparently, Luther the preacher was most interested in Bernard the preacher, that is, the preacher of the crib and the cross of Christ, but not of the crusade. The German Cicero looked up to Bernard as the greatest medieval rhetor. This observation is mirrored in Luther's numerous references to Bernard's rhetorically exquisite "sermons."

Luther, the theologian of grace and of faith, accepted Bernard as his spiritual master and as one of the greatest witnesses to the gospel. Bernard's thoughts had a remarkable influence upon Luther's early lectures on the Psalms and on

the Pauline Letters—delivered during the decisive years of his “Reformational turn.” This fact led Carl Stange, a scholar of both Bernard and Luther, to the observation—on the occasion of a Lutheran academy’s commemoration of the eight hundredth anniversary of Bernard’s death in 1953—that Luther found the “decisive impulse for his further [Reformation] development” in reading Bernard.⁷

There is a theological continuity from the apostolic tradition via Hilary, Jerome, Augustine, and Bernard to Luther. In this regard the Reformer declared once at the table that as an adolescent he “took to heart Hilary, Jerome, Augustine, Bernard, etc.” These fathers did not read Aristotle, Luther observed, and, as a young man, indeed, he had been left with the belief that these church fathers were no theologians at all—since they had not read Aristotle—or perhaps they were theologians “of a different kind.”⁸ Luther was so impressed with the Cistercian father that he did not shy away from calling him the “Divine Bernard” (*Divus Bernardus*), in contemporary humanistic fashion.⁹ Luther especially esteemed an assertion of “grace alone” which he had found in Bernard’s sermon on the Annunciation of our Lord and, similarly, a story which he must have encountered in *The Golden Legend* wherein the aging abbot is reported to have said that a monk’s life, work, and achievements meant nothing for eternal salvation.¹⁰

Early in his career, during his first lectures on the Psalms, Luther stated that Bernard “meditates beautifully” on man’s justification by God’s non-imputation of his sins.¹¹ Thus, there is great probability that Bernard was one of the decisive causes of Luther’s Reformation breakthrough—a probability which has up to now scarcely been acknowledged. In a writing of 1539, indeed, Luther specifically states: “that sinners shall be stirred to repentance through the preaching or the contemplation of the passion of Christ, so that they might see the enormity of God’s wrath over sin and learn that there is no other remedy for this than the death of God’s Son—this doctrine is not mine but Bernard’s....”¹²

Not only the preaching and teaching Bernard made a great impression on Luther, but also the praying Bernard.¹³ Apparently Luther and Bernard shared common thoughts on prayer. The spiritual master Bernard—when praying and thus

moving “in faith”—was “a beautiful teacher” who “ascribed everything to Christ.”¹⁴ Luther considered what Bernard had said on prayer the most beautiful thinking thereon that he had ever heard or read, and he posed this rhetorical question: “What could be more Christian?”¹⁵ “Therefore, Bernard was a fine man who had Christian thoughts.”¹⁶ Thus, also regard to a life of prayer, Bernard was Luther’s mentor. The German Reformer approvingly observed that Bernard painstakingly admonished his people to prayer, making “excellent statements in this regard.”¹⁷

Bernard’s experience of the “sweetness of the faith” enjoyed the admiration of both the young Luther and the aged Luther.¹⁸ In Luther’s eyes Bernard was such a great master because “he knew Christ as his Savior and felt [Him] in his heart” and so “did not err in the spirit.”¹⁹ Luther appreciated Bernard so highly that he reserved the honorific title of “father” for him alone, and he recommended the diligent study of his works: “He is the only one worthy of the name ‘Father Bernard’ and of being studied diligently.”²⁰

Who was this man whom Luther revered so highly? It is impossible, of course, to present an exhaustive biography of his life and works here. But some basic statements about Bernard are in order. In a letter to a Carthusian prior Bernard once called himself the monster of his age, the “chimaera” of the twelfth century. Thus, his life reminded himself and others of the fantastic fire-breathing monster with a lion’s head and a serpent’s tail and a goat’s body: “May my monstrous life, my bitter conscience, move you to pity. I am a sort of modern chimaera, neither cleric nor layman. I have kept the habit of a monk, but I have long ago abandoned the life.”²¹

To some contemporaries he may have appeared a chimaera indeed. But the impression he made upon others, and centuries later upon Luther, was quite different. To the Reformer he was the last of the church fathers, a superb biblical theologian, and an even greater preacher than Augustine. Luther’s Order of the Hermits of St. Augustine was naturally particularly fond of Augustine, so that it is somewhat surprising that Luther ranked the preaching of Bernard even higher than Augustine’s.

In Bernard’s time a new theology influenced by the ancient pagan philosophy of Aristotle arose in the form of what today

is called Scholasticism. It was fostered and inspired by Peter Abelard, Bernard's foe. This medieval theological development was utterly despised by Luther as the business of "sow the theologians" who were rooting in the dirt. This "development" he considered a theological deformation which needed to be subjected to a reformation which would return to the pre-scholastic church fathers and ultimately to the Sacred Scriptures.

As to biography itself, there is very little historical information about Bernard's early years. Somewhere between the years 1111 and 1113, at the age of twenty-one, he entered the strict Benedictine monastery at Citeaux. Only a few years later he was sent to found a new cloister at Clairvaux, where he became the abbot. He led the monastery there until his death—hence his name "Bernard of Clairvaux."²²

Some time before 1124 he wrote his first spiritual masterpiece, *The Steps of Humility and Pride*. Probably in the following year, 1125, he composed the *Letter on Love*. This "letter" was placed at the end of another tractate which he wrote shortly afterward, *On Loving God*. These early works did not leave any traceable impact on Luther's works, even though they were quite influential elsewhere throughout subsequent ages. During his convalescence from an illness Bernard wrote a series of sermons entitled *In Praise of the Virgin Mother* which are also known, from the initial line in Latin, as *Missus est Angelus*. In these so-called "Marian" sermons the christocentric concentration is never lost. The Bernardine focus on Christ incarnate led Luther to exclaim in his late lectures on Genesis: "Bernard really loved Christ's incarnation!"²³

Beginning with the year 1128, Bernard became involved in church politics and in the affairs of the Knights Templar. This order was established at Jerusalem by a cousin of Bernard, at whose request he wrote the *Book in Praise of the New Militia* between 1128 and 1136. Neither this work nor the one immediately preceding it, *On the Conduct and Duties of Bishops* (1127-1128), had any noticeable impact on Luther.

In the 1130's Bernard treated the question of *Grace and Free Choice*. In his introduction he states: "We trust the reader may be pleased to find that we have never strayed far from the Apostle's meaning," that is, the intention of St. Paul. This

treatise may, indeed, be considered Bernard's commentary on Paul's Letter to the Romans, to which he referred eighteen times explicitly and twenty-five times implicitly.²⁴ Bernard was particularly concerned with Romans 5-8. His *leitmotif* was the question which he posed at the beginning: "What part do you play...if it is all God's work?" More precisely he asked "What part, then, does free choice [*liberum arbitrium*] play?" He gave the answer with one verb in the passive form: *salvatur*. That is to say, free choice itself is in need of redemption. Thus his answer was that free choice plays no active part whatsoever: "Take away free choice and there is nothing to be saved. Take away grace and there is no means of saving.... God is the author of salvation; 'free choice' is merely capable of receiving it. None but God can give it; nothing but free choice can receive it." He continued: "For to consent is to be saved." "Where you have consent, there also is the will [*voluntas*]. But where the will is, there is freedom. And this is what I understand by the term 'free choice.'" Bernard made it perfectly clear that "salvation is from the Lord (Psalm 3:9), not from free choice." He stated that "whereas the whole is done *in* free choice, so is the whole done of *grace*," and, referring to Romans 9:16, he asserted: "it is not a question of man's willing or doing but of God's grace."²⁵ Bernard argued that he who justifies himself ignores the justice-righteousness of God, and he is one who takes his own merits from elsewhere than grace.²⁶

At times, passages in *Grace and Free Choice* sound like Luther. But they are thoughts which Bernard developed on the basis of Paul's Letter to the Romans. Strangely, however, Luther did not pay much attention to this Bernardine "commentary" on the Letter to the Romans. No direct quote from this work can be located in Luther's works. The question arises whether Luther had access to it and, if so, whether he ever studied it.

In 1135 a Carthusian friend invited Bernard to undertake a commentary *On the Song of Songs*. Thus, the "sermons" contained in this work were not delivered as homilies to the monks, but were Bernard's biblical reflections written in the literary form of *sermones*, to be read by or to other monks. The most famous sermon in this series is number 43, known from its initial word as *Fasciculus Myrrhae*, in which Bernard's affective christocentrism comes to its culmination. Sermons 61

and 62 are meditations on the wounds of Christ, a devotional practice which was continued in the following centuries. Also Luther was advised by his superior, John von Staupitz, that he ought to meditate on the wounds of Christ in order to overcome the theological doubts raised by his concentration on predestination.²⁷ Luther obeyed.

These eighty-six "sermons" are actually a sequence of tractates—at times more concerned with personal (and more or less mystical) experiences than with the biblical text—and they are interwoven with excursions into dogmatic theology and church history. In any case, Bernard's biblical meditations are always connected to the personal experience of man's existence before God in the "world"—inside or outside the cloister walls; and thus they are "existential" interpretations of the Bible. Luther made ample use of these Benardine "existential" meditations. Luther's quotations from and allusions to these sermons on the Canticle are so numerous that they cannot be treated here in a comprehensive way. They deserve a study of their own.

Bernard's labors on the Song of Songs lasted many years. He had to interrupt them more than once. During a sojourn at Paris in 1140, he gave a public talk to student clerics, urging them to quit their life of vice. Shortly afterwards, he edited his talk in the form of a tract under the title *On the Conversion of Clerics*. It was a call to enter the monastic life. More than twenty people from his original audience followed him back to his monastery at Clairvaux. This work seems, however, to play no role in Luther's works.

In the same year, 1140, Bernard participated in the Synod of Sens where Peter Abelard's teachings were to be discussed. Instead they were referred to Rome. From this historical context emerged Bernard's famous "letter" to Pope Innocent II, *Against the Errors of Abelard*, which is counted as number 190 in a collection of more than five hundred letters. It too, however, left no trace in Luther's works.

Three years later, around 1143-1144, two Benedictines at Chartres, who had difficulties with their superior, requested from Bernard a clarification of the Rule of St. Benedict. Bernard's response was a treatise entitled *On Precept and Dispensation*. There he set forth his view of the relationship between the power of the abbot and the free conscience of the

subordinate monk. Luther knew this work and commented on it, praising Bernard in doing so.²⁸

In 1145 a former monk of Clairvaux became Pope Eugenius III. In 1146 Bernard was summoned by pope and king to drum up support for a French crusade to the Holy Land. This duty kept him on the road for one and a half years—until the spring of 1148. When this “armed pilgrimage,” as one may describe the original idea of a “crusade,” resulted in failure, Bernard came under criticism which adversely affected his Cistercian monasteries. During that time, Bernard must have had the reform-minded Archbishop of Armagh (Ireland) as his guest at Clairvaux; he died there in 1148. Bernard gathered information about the prelate’s life and homeland and so produced the *Life of St. Malachy*. This work appears to have been unknown to Luther.

Besides commenting and meditating on the Song of Songs in his last years, Bernard was occupied with the reformation of the church on all levels, including the monarchical head. Therefore, in 1152-1153 he wrote five volumes on the papal office entitled *On Consideration*, in response to the request of the first Cistercian pope, Eugenius III. This work includes criticisms of the contemporary papal administration and outlines the pastoral duties of a pope. This work became a means of examining the consciences of popes and other rulers in the Middle Ages.²⁹ In the following paragraphs, I shall highlight only those sections which Luther quoted or to which he at least alluded.

The pope is told to engage in the “consideration” of things unknown to him, including his own self. Bernard saw the danger of ending up with a hardened heart, as the pharaoh did in Exodus 7:13, a theme which Luther would pick up.³⁰ Book Two deals with the “three-fold consideration of the self.” If one does not know oneself, one is like a building without a foundation. In this context the pope was reminded that the Apostle Peter’s successor was not to receive silver and gold. The saintly abbot inculcated this thought: “You are the one shepherd not only of all the sheep, but of all the shepherds,” referring to John 10:16. In Book Three the admonitions continue. Christ is the head of the church, her Lord; the pope is only His steward. Christ claims the possession of the earth for Himself by right of creation, by merit of redemption, and

1 by gift from the Father. The pope should leave possession and rule to Him.

2 Book Four considers the pope's immediate milieu, which Bernard described in powerful metaphors. The pope had to provide the example of a pastor. Again, the simple model of St. Peter is evoked. He had never gone in procession adorned with either jewels or silks, covered with gold, carried on a white horse, attended by a knight, or surrounded by clamoring servants; and "he believed it was enough to be able to fulfill the Lord's command" of John 21:15. And quite bluntly and provocatively Bernard added: "In this [finery], you are the successor not of Peter, but of Constantine." He could not have said it more clearly, but he added yet: "To preach the gospel is to feed. Do the work of an evangelist and you have fulfilled the work of the pastor." In the epilogue to Book Four Bernard wanted the pope to see the Holy Roman Church, of which he was the head, as the mother of the churches, not the mistress (*domina*). He told the pope that he was not the lord of bishops, but one of them, and the brother of those who love God and the companion of those who fear Him. He was to be a friend of the bridegroom (Christ) and an attendant of the bride (the church). He was to be the shepherd of the people. Indeed, Bernard's *De Consideratione* contains the most critical, yet loyal, and the "most virulent attack ever written" on the Vatican.³¹ Luther referred to Bernard's "advice to a pope" at least ten times, and he demanded that "all popes should know it by heart." It is known that a copy of *De Consideratione* (as published by Anton Sorg at Augsburg) was available in the library of Luther's friary at Erfurt—besides copies of Bernard's sermons on the Song of Songs and his *Sermones de Tempore et de Sanctis*.³²

Toward the end of his life Bernard carefully edited and revised his most important writings, word by word, so as to leave a definite inheritance behind. He selected 225 letters for an official collection intended for publication. Other writings contain his life-long teaching, as occasioned by the liturgical calendar, cast in the literary form of "sermons." They were based mostly on the pericopes of the various feasts in the ecclesiastical calendar. The aging Bernard himself edited a vast collection of his sermons and thus created a handbook of the liturgical year, including sermons on the high feasts of the Lord, the feasts of the Mother of God, and the feasts of other

saints. Luther made use of these collections, especially of the first sermon on the Feast of the Annunciation. In regard to the collection of letters, there is some evidence that Luther had access to it or that somehow he had knowledge of some of its contents, such as letters 91, 201, and 385. But perhaps the adage-like utterances which are found in these letters were handed down separately through the ages and in this way became known to Luther as Bernardine proverbs.

Bernard died on August 20, 1153. Approximately twenty years later, in 1174, he was elevated to canonical sainthood. A hundred years later his impact upon Christian piety grew even more when, not only the story of his life, but also quotations from his works were woven into *The Golden Legend* by Jacob of Voragine, who repeatedly interspersed readings allotted to the high feasts of the liturgical year with references to St. Bernard (and St. Augustine, of course). The reading in *The Golden Legend* for March 25, that is, the Feast of the Annunciation, was immediately followed by the reading of "The Passion of the Lord." Both are permeated by Bernardine thoughts. Thus, Bernard's spirituality became an integral part of Jacob de Voragine's lectionary of the lives of the saints. By the late Middle Ages this *Legenda Aurea* was translated into various languages and widely broadcasted in printed form.³³ Luther was familiar with *The Golden Legend* and loved to refer especially to its story of Bernard.

The works of St. Bernard were often created in response to given circumstances. Yet they provide us with lasting insights from the spirituality of the great master of Western Christianity. Bernard, from among all the doctors of the church, was declared by Luther to be worthy of diligent study and worthy of being addressed as a father in the faith: *Pater Bernhardus*.³⁴

II. *Luther and Bernard's Sermons*

A. *General Considerations*

In reading the vast Bernardine opus with Luther's selective spectacles, one encounters many ideas which caught Luther's eye. Early on, Luther learned from Bernard that in religious matters "not to progress is to regress."³⁵ In the present study we shall limit ourselves to Bernard's Advent sermons and take notice of those passages which most likely inspired Luther in his own preaching and teaching.

e One must note at the outset that the "mysticism" of the
e Middle Ages did not have a lasting impact on Luther, although
d he was touched by it for several years, especially by what is
s called "German mysticism."³⁶ Of course, Bernard's mysticism
e deserves fuller attention than can be given here; and whether
e or not and, if so, to what degree it rubbed off on Luther is a
/ matter of debate. Reinhard Schwarz considered Luther one of
/ the "great mystics" in the history of Christianity.³⁷ Certainly,
/ however, the Bernardine statements which Luther remem-
/ bered reading are not "mystical" ones. The Reformer was
/ interested in Bernard as a biblical theologian and a preacher
/ of the gospel, not as a "mystic" in the sense in which the term
/ is usually understood today. Bernard's most mystical passages
/ had no traceable impact on Luther. The Reformer alerted his
/ audience primarily to Bernard's christocentric piety, that is,
/ to meditation on the wounds of Christ, to his incarnational
/ christology, and to his theology of grace alone and faith alone.

Experts might miss a closer examination of Bernard's and Luther's Mariology. It certainly deserves further consideration, but it cannot be treated here. A note in this regard is, however, in order. Along with many others, Luther mistakenly believed that Bernard's traditional honorific title of *Doctor Mellifluus* originated in his sweet praise of the Virgin Mary, as the Reformer indicated in a lecture in 1527, where simultaneously he had rather critical words for any exaggerations in Marian piety:

They who made Christ a judge sought His mother as *paracleta* as Bernard did, who is one of those elect who fell into error [at this point]. I hope that in the end they found better insights. The same is true for Anselm, who is called the Chancellor of the Virgin (*Cancellarius Virginis*). And Bernard is called the *Doctor Mellifluus* because of his preaching about the virgin.³⁸

A corrective note is in order in regard to this designation of Bernard as *Doctor Mellifluus*. This honorific title—"Dr. Honeysweet"—is grounded not in Bernard's praise of Mary, but in his expertise in biblical theology. Tradition regarded him, above all, as an interpreter of the Sacred Scriptures, depicting him opening "the Book" and drawing the hidden meaning from the literal sense of the biblical text as Moses drew water from a rock or as one draws honey from the

honeycomb.³⁹ Thence comes his title of *Doctor Mellifluus*—and not from his sermons on Mary.

Luther kept his distance from any exaggerated Marian devotion by incessantly applying his theological principle of christocentrism. Therefore, down to his last sermon at Wittenberg in 1546, Luther deplored Bernard's treatment of the gospel of the Feast of the Annunciation and complained that he had written "most impious" things in sermons such as *Missus est Angelus*. Luther wanted to correct this distortion and demanded that on the Feast of the Annunciation one use one's rhetorical talents to proclaim the incarnate Christ, in order to tell the people that "we are made His brothers" (as Bernard, by the way, had said in a sermon on the Canticle). In his table talk Luther once spoke severely of *Missus est Angelus*: "Bernard spent his entire sermon on the praise of Mary and forgot about God's deeds." The real joy stemmed not from the creature, Mary, but from the fact that the Creator Himself came into the world to make Himself our salvation.⁴⁰ One should really call the Feast of the Annunciation the "Feast Day of the Incarnation of Christ."⁴¹ Whether Luther was aware of it or not, his own suggestion corresponded partially to Bernard's occasional designation of this feast as the Feast of the "Annunciation of the Lord," as Bernard called it at the beginning of Sermons 2 and 3 on the Annunciation. In contrast, the Roman tradition was accustomed to speak of the *Annuntiatio Beatae Mariae Virginis*.

In any case, Luther was clearly an eager reader of Bernard of Clairvaux. Indeed, in his study of the history of the councils and the church Luther, in refuting certain critics who slighted his knowledge of the church fathers, declared with justification: "I have read more than they think."⁴² Certainly he had read Bernard's Advent sermons. Luther's teaching and preaching profited from them. The thoughts in Bernard's Advent sermons found a welcome reception in Luther's thinking, starting with Luther's first course on the Psalms (*Dictata*).

B. Specific Examples of Influence

1. The Happy Soul

Luther explicitly indicated in his *Dictata* that, when speaking of a "happy soul," he meant the phrase in the sense in which it was used in Bernard's Advent sermons. Luther

appropriated Bernard as follows: "So Blessed Bernard in an Advent sermon expresses this idea with different words as follows: 'O happy soul which always judges itself before the eyes of God and accuses itself. Because if we judge ourselves, we will not be judged by God.'" ⁴³ Luther was referring to a passage in Bernard's third Advent sermon, where the original wording is slightly different. ⁴⁴

2. *Divine Consolation*

In view of this explicit reference to Bernard's third Advent sermon, one may infer with some propriety that something else in that sermon influenced Luther's thinking. It is a passage in which Bernard addressed his brethren, saying that it was worth their while to celebrate the Advent of the Lord, to be delighted by so much divine consolation, to be excited by so much worthiness, and to be inflamed by so much love. ⁴⁵ It may have been this passage which Luther had in mind (quite possibly in combination with other Bernardine *loci*) when he mentioned Bernard in another place in his *Dictata*. Luther's vagueness creates some difficulty in locating his reference in Bernard's *opera*. Luther declared that "Blessed Bernard said" that the divine consolation is so tender that no consolation from elsewhere is tolerated. Luther's Latin may best be understood with the help of his own German version: "But God's Word is so tender that it does not tolerate any addition; it wants to be all by itself or not at all." ⁴⁶ Luther's German form of the citation is close to Johannes Tauler's, who also quoted it as a Bernardine saying—and in German: "Divine consolation is so tender that it does not admit in any way any consolation from anywhere else." ⁴⁷

Luther may have quoted a Bernardine dictum according to Tauler's citation of Bernard, since Tauler provided him with the German version of the same idea. In other words, a statement in Bernard's third Advent sermon may have been melded with the Bernardine line as handed down by Tauler. Admittedly, the specific wording of this line most likely has its origin in a Pseudo-Bernardine text. Then, too, it has some similarity to a sentence in a Bernardine Lenten sermon. ⁴⁸ In effect, Luther blended Bernard's teaching with Tauler's teaching, here in the *Dictata* and elsewhere—for instance, in his Christmas sermon of 1520. ⁴⁹

3. *The Triple Advent*

The concept of the “triple advent of Christ” also had an impact on Luther’s *Dictata*. Luther thought he had read of it in Bernard’s sermons on the Canticle.⁵⁰ However, the Cistercian preacher developed the concept of the three comings of Christ in his Advent sermons, especially in the third Advent sermon. Bernard’s concept includes the following elements: The first coming is the incarnation, which is the general advent to all men, *ad homines*. Then there is the *parousia*, usually called the “second coming,” the advent on the day of judgment, which is Christ’s coming against men, *contra homines*. The third advent is the spiritual birth in the soul—a “mystical” advent, *in homines*. Bernard numbered these three advents differently at times: what is known as the “second coming” is also called the “third advent,” and the spiritual advent in the soul can become the “second advent” in his counting. Thus, between the incarnation in past time and the *parousia* at the end of time, the spiritual advent in the individual soul takes place as the second (though hidden) advent.⁵¹

St. Bernard also preached on the triple advent in his fifth advent sermon, where he repeated that the intermediate advent is the hidden one in which only His chosen ones see the Lord, in themselves, and so their souls are saved.⁵² In his sixth sermon, he also focused on the heavenly guest’s arrival, that is, Christ’s spiritual advent in the soul: “You have a noble guest, O flesh, a very noble guest; and your salvation depends entirely on Him. Give honor to so great a guest.”⁵³ The concept shows up also in his seventh sermon, a rather short one in which St. Bernard treated the topic of “triple utility” (*de triplice utilitate*). Here he discussed the usefulness of the triple advent for man—firstly, it serves to illuminate our blindness; secondly, to assist our infirmity; thirdly, to protect us and fight for us in our fragility. All these things occur in the believing soul where Christ resides by faith.⁵⁴

Bernard’s concept of Christ’s triple advent served Luther as the immediate matrix of his interpretations of Psalm 101:2 (“when wilt Thou come to me?”) and Psalm 102:2 (“non advertas faciem tuam a me” in the Vulgate; “turn not Thy face away from me”). In expounding Psalm 101:2, Luther declared that he understood the time of the Lord’s coming to be any

given time, whether past, present, or future. Luther added that St. Bernard spoke *pulchre* (in a beautiful way) about the distinction between the several comings of Christ.⁵⁵

The reference to St. Bernard in the course of the *Dictata* was triggered by Luther's knowledge of Bernard's concept of the spiritual encounter with Christ as one of the three advents of Christ. Luther, speaking in the words of Psalm 102:2, expressed the hope that Christ would not turn away His "face" from him. At this point he was definitely lecturing within the framework of St. Bernard's triple advent of Christ. However, Luther spoke of Christ's triple *face* rather than *advent*, because Psalm 102 speaks of the "face of the Lord." Luther adapted the wording, but retained the content of the Bernardine concept:

Christ's face is triple: firstly, in His first advent when He was made incarnate who as Son of God is the face of the Father. . . ; secondly, in the spiritual advent without which the first is good for nothing—and so one has to recognize His face through faith; thirdly, in the second and last advent when His face will be fully visible.⁵⁶

Luther, then, did not refer to St. Bernard by name in interpreting Psalm 102:2. However, the concept of a triple encounter with Christ is so distinctly Bernardine that one must assume that Luther borrowed it from the abbot's Advent sermons. In his interpretation of Psalm 101:2, then, Luther explicitly referred to the Bernardine "distinction" between the three advents of Christ; in speaking on the ensuing psalm, he used the sequence of the three advents in the way in which St. Bernard had stated it. Later on, too, in these same lectures Luther spoke of St. Bernard again, as he dealt with Psalm 119:46.⁵⁷ Thus, it is safe to say that Bernard was Luther's spiritual companion during this entire series of early lectures on the Psalms.

4. *Adventus Christi Mysticus in Iudeos*

The idea of Christ's triple coming borrowed from Bernard's Advent sermons could very well have contributed to another thought in Luther's early exegesis, even though there is no specific indication that Luther was thinking of Bernard on that occasion. It is Luther's mention of "Christ's mysterious coming to the Jews" in the course of his lectures on the Letter to the Romans, specifically in expounding Romans 11:26.⁵⁸ Luther did not specify what he meant by *mysticus* in his

“adventus Christi mysticus in Iudeos,” except that in his subsequent sentence he contrasted this “mystical advent” to the “corporal advent” of Christ. The latter was the first coming, the physical coming of Christ in the flesh, in fulfillment of the prophetic saying of Isaiah (59:20) quoted by Paul in Romans 11:26.⁵⁹ At this time in his life, however Luther was willing to submit himself to the judgment of the church fathers, who, despite the clear significance of Isaiah 59:20, referred Romans 11:25 to a future end-time. To be sure, said Luther, no one could elicit this idea from Isaiah or Paul except for the guidance of the fathers. This guidance, however, led to the conclusion that “now. . . ‘blindness has come upon part in Israel,’ but in that future day not a part but all of Israel will be saved. Now a part has been saved, but then all.”⁶⁰ This is the “mystical advent of Christ” for the salvation of the Jews.

Luther’s expression “in Iudeos” deserves closer attention. He said not “ad Iudeos,” but “in Iudeos.” I should like to propose that behind this wording lay St. Bernard’s concept of “the triple advent of Christ,” which, as we have seen, consisted in a coming *ad homines*, a coming *in homines*, and a coming *contra homines*. The third is the coming for the last judgment. The first is the coming into the flesh. Both of these comings are generally observable, Bernard says, while the coming *in homines* is “hidden.” It is the “spiritual coming” of Christ which is experienced only by the elect, who see Him *within* themselves, because they are believers and Christ comes through faith to live in their hearts. This coming is hidden, he says, using the Latin word “occultus.” In this perspective I should like to suggest that Luther’s expression of “mystical advent” is to be understood as the hidden advent in the heart of the believer. Thus, Luther may be understood as saying that the “mysterious coming to the Jews” (*in Iudeos*) is a coming into the hearts of Jews when they become believers, as they are granted this grace through the mercy of God (Romans 11:26, 32). It seems to me that Bernard’s concept of the triple advent of Christ contributed here to Luther’s exposition. Certainly elsewhere in his lectures on Romans, namely, in expounding Romans 8:16, Luther made quite explicit use of Bernard’s first sermon on the Feast of the Annunciation.⁶¹

5. *The Incarnation of the Son*

Bernard’s first Advent sermon contains an attempt to answer the question of why specifically the Son became

s incarnate and not the Father or the Spirit. Bernard's response
o to this question began to leave its traceable marks in Luther's
t works a decade or so after his lectures on Romans. Luther, in
t reading the Bernardine Advent sermons, would have encountered
t this paragraph:

. . . But why from the Three Persons in whom we believe as the Highest Trinity is it the Son who comes, and not the Father or the Holy Spirit? This surely did not happen without reason. . . "But who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been His counselor?" And, of course, it happened not without the highest consultation of the Trinity that it was the Son who came; and if we consider how our exile came about, we may be able to understand a little how fitting it was for the Son to be the one who most of all liberated us. Lucifer was hurled by God from heaven, because he tried to usurp for himself the similarity [*similitudo*] of the Most High, and such equality was considered robbery. It is proper only to the Son. The Father, therefore, jealous on the Son's behalf, seems by that act to say: "Vengeance is mine. I will repay." [And the Son said:] "I observed Satan fall from the sky like lightning." . . . [Lucifer] performed no act. All he did was thinking with pride (*superbia*); and in a moment, in the bat of an eyelid, he was cast down beyond recall. . . .⁶²

This Bernardine reflection on the mystery of the incarnation appears for the first time in Luther's works in a sermon of 1526. Luther combined this Bernardine thought with a colorful comparison (also inherited from the patristic tradition) of God and a fisherman who uses a worm on his hook. God hides the divinity of the Son (the hook) within the humanity (the worm—an image taken from Psalm 22).⁶³ The Reformer likewise integrated Bernardine thinking on the incarnation into his Christmas sermons of 1533 and 1535, his exposition of John 1:14 in September of 1537, and finally his last exegetical project, the lectures on Genesis.

In fact, in his Christmas sermon of 1533 Luther referred to Bernard's thinking more directly than in 1526. Indeed, the stenographer of this sermon, Georg Rörer, wrote the name *Bernardus* in the margin of his notes, in order to explain Luther's reference to unnamed fathers who had given some

thought to the matter of which he was speaking.⁶⁴ Luther preached these words on Christmas in 1533:

There were fathers who gave some thought to this matter, and they said that the devil, when living in heaven, saw that God would become man, and this caused his down-fall; [they said] that, because God assumed this nature, not the angelic one, therefore there was envy and haughtiness. . . [These fathers] wanted to indicate the great joy [which we should feel] and the overwhelming goodness [of God shown in this], that He assumed, not the angelic [nature], but Adam's. . . flesh and blood, which had been spoiled by the devil through sin and death and poison.⁶⁵

Two years later, again on Christmas (December 25, 1535), Luther gave the afternoon sermon on the Christmas gospel, focusing on Luke 2:10-13. He followed in the tracks of tradition when, in a sort of allegory, he alluded to the burning bush: but for Christmas one would have to fear its brightness; but because of Christmas night one has no need to be afraid, because the angels have brought a joyful light. The allusion to the burning bush on Mount Sinai was a motif used by St. Bernard as he preached about Mary as the woman of Revelation 12.⁶⁶ Within this same sermon Luther made an explicit reference to the *Doctor Mellifluus* in speaking of the Son of God assuming, not an angelic nature, but our human nature: "Saint Bernard was a wonderful man (*mirabile vir*); he believed that the devil in paradise learned that God would become man. . . ." Luther continues, however, by saying of the good angels that "they do not mind at all and they are happy that God is not called an angelic God (*Engelischer Gott*) and that God becomes, not an angel, but a person."⁶⁷ Thus, Bernard's words on the Son of God becoming a man and not an angel (*Engel*) again entered the Reformer's mind (as they had two years earlier) when he stood in the pulpit on Christmas Day of 1535.

Conclusion

Bernard, as the greatest representative of monastic theology, influenced Luther, not only as a friar, but also as an ex-friar and even as the Reformer. In this article I could demonstrate such a conclusion only with respect to some of Luther's early works and some later sermons and with respect

to Bernard's Advent sermons. But Luther's repertory of Bernardine thoughts was much larger. The impact of Bernard on the elder Luther is to be demonstrated elsewhere.⁶⁸ However, at this point in the history of research, not all of Luther's allusions to Bernard have been retrieved by scholars. There are still a number of references which remain unidentified at this time.⁶⁹ Nevertheless, we may maintain that there is evidence of Luther's sympathetic use of Bernardine sources. Luther, during his entire career, enjoyed the spiritual company of Bernard in spite of the centuries that separated the two. The great German preacher of the Reformation drew various insights from the great French preacher of the Middle Ages, as the more than five hundred references to Bernard in the most complete edition of Luther's works indicate. Therefore, a recent study (on Bernard and Calvin) is wrong when it insinuates that Luther did not seem to make much use of Bernard's thinking.⁷⁰ The evidence presented here shows the contrary. The import of this evidence is magnified by noting that Luther totally neglected Peter Abelard, Bernard's scholastic foe. And, if one compares Luther's allusions to the representatives of the so-called "German Mysticism" (such as Meister Eckhart, Johannes Tauler, and the anonymous Frankfurter who wrote the *Theologia Germanica*), one comes upon some surprising facts: Luther never directly or indirectly quoted or mentioned Meister Eckhart by name; and, compared to Bernard, Luther referred relatively rarely to Tauler and to the Frankfurter whose work he had edited. Luther's often literal quotations from, direct references to, and indirect allusions to Bernard outnumber these others by the hundreds. During his entire life as friar, as ex-friar, and as "Church Father" of the Church in Germany, Luther was indebted to Bernard, the monastic theologian. This debt is not surprising, because monastic theology understood itself as rather removed from the theology of the Scholastics, whom Luther called "sow theologians." Thus, Bernard was to Luther truly a father in the faith, as the Reformer himself indicated by reverently speaking of the abbot as the only theologian really worthy of being called "father" and of being studied diligently: *Pater Bernhardus*.

ENDNOTES

1. See Pierre Chaunu, as quoted by Theo Bell, *Bernhardus Dixit Bernardus van Clairvaux in Martin Luthers Werken* (Delft Eburon, 1989), p. 345; August Neander, *Der heilige Bernhard und sein Zeitalter* (Hamburg-Gotha, 1813), second edition, 1848
2. Hubert Jedin, *A History of the Council of Trent*, translated by E. Graf (New York: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1957), 1, p. 190.
3. WA, 46:782, 21-24. (The abbreviation of WA means the Weimar Ausgabe, i.e., the critical edition of Luther's works.)
4. WA, TR, 1: no. 584; WA, TR, 5: no. 5439a.
5. WA, TR, 3: 295, 6-7 (no. 330).
6. See WA, 15:755, 7-9 (sermon of November 20, 1524).
7. Carl Stange, *Bernhard von Clairvaux*. Studien der Luther-Akademie, edited by Carl Stange on the order of the board of directors (Berlin: Verlag Alfred Topelmann), p. 5; See Erich Kleineidam, "Ursprung und Gegenstand der Theologie bei Bernhard von Clairvaux und Martin Luther," *Dienst der Vermittlung*, edited by Wilhelm Ernst et al. (Leipzig: St. Benno Verlag, 1977), pp. 221-247; Franz Posset, "Bernardus Redivivus: The Wirkungsgeschichte of a Medieval Sermon in the Reformation of the Sixteenth Century," *Cistercian Studies*, 22 (1987), pp. 239-249; idem, *Luther's Catholic Christology According to His Johannine Lectures of 1527* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1988), pp. 116-128; idem, "Monastic Influence on Martin Luther," *Monastic Studies*, 18 (Montreal: The Benedictine Priory, 1988), pp. 136-163.
8. WA, TR, 3: 295, 3ff.; WA, 60:125, 40-44.
9. WA, 2: 15, 18.
10. See WA, 20:746, 15-19.
11. See WA, 3:175, 33-34; Bell, op. cit., pp. 42-71.
12. WA, 50:471, 1-5.
13. WA, 31, II:566, 30-31.
14. WA, 40, III:354, 3-5 (manuscript), 16-24 (printed version).
15. WA, 40, III: 25-26.
16. WA, 46:86, 34-39.
17. See WA, 43:33, 26-27.
18. See WA, 40, III:652, 20-23 (on Isaiah 9:5[1546]).

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19. WA, 20:753, 22-23.
20. WA, 47:109, 18-23.
- t. 21. Bruno Scott James, *The Letters of St. Bernard of Clairvaux* (London: Burns Oates, 1953), pp. 401-402 (no. 326).
- t: 22. See Jean Leclercq, "Introduction" to *Bernard of Clairvaux: Selected Works* (New York and Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1987), pp. 13-57.
- d 23. WA, 43:581, 11-12.
- l. 24. See Bernard McGinn, "Introduction" to *On Grace and Free Choice* (Cistercian Fathers Series, 19, Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1977), 5, n. 13.
- r 25. *Opera*, III: 165-200, (*Opera* is the abbreviation used from here on for the critical edition of Bernard's works, *Sancti Bernardi Opera Omnia*, edited by Jean Leclercq, Henri Rochais, and C.H. Talbot (Rome: 1957-).
26. "Qui seipsum iustificat, Dei iustitiam ignorat. . . Qui est qui seipsum iustificat? Qui merita sibi aliunde praesumit quam a gratia." *Opera*, III: 201, 1-3. See also 203, 14-19.
27. See WA, TR, 2:112, 9-11 (no. 1490); WA, TR, 5:293, 28-30 (no. 5658a); WA, *Briefwechsel*, 9:627, 23-25 (February 23, 1542).
28. See WA, 8:331, 13-15; 634, 1-5.
29. See the appendices in the translation of *De Consideratione* in the Cistercian Fathers Series (37), *Five Books on Consideration: Advice to a Pope*, translated by John D. Anderson and Elizabeth T. Kennan (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1976), p. 188. See also Karl Bihlmeyer and Hermann Tuchsle, *Church History*, translated by Victor E. Mills and Francis J. Miller (Westminster, Maryland: The Newman Press, 1963), volume 2: p. 170; Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine, The Growth of Medieval Theology (600-1300)* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1978), volume 3: p. 300; cf. volume 4: p. 71.
30. *Opera*, III:396, 11-14.
31. See Leclercq, "Introduction" to *Bernard of Clairvaux, Selected Works*, p. 25.
32. See Jun Matsuura, "Restbestände aus der Bibliothek des Erfurter Augustinerklosters zu Luthers Zeit und bisher unbekannte eigenhändige Notizen Luthers," *Lutheriana: Zum 500. Geburtstag Martin Luthers von den Mitarbeitern der Weimarer Ausgabe* (Cologne: Böhlau, 1984), pp. 318, 324, 326.

33. *The Golden Legend of Jacobus de Voragine*, translated by Granger Ryan and Helmut Ripperger (New York: 1941).
34. WA, 47: 109, 18-23.
35. *Opera*, IV: 340, 1; quoted in WA, 56:486, 7.
36. See Bengt R. Hoffman, *Luther and the Mystics* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1976).
37. See Reinhard Schwarz, "Martin Luther (1483-1546)," *Grosse Mystiker: Leben und Wirken*, edited by Gerhard Ruhbach and Josef Sudbrack (Munich: Verlag C.H. Beck, 1984), pp. 185-202.
38. WA, 20:837, 38.
39. See Leclercq, "Introduction" to *Bernard of Clairvaux, Selected Works*, p. 33.
40. See WA, TR, 1:45, 21-29 (no. 118); WA, TR, 1:218, 27-219, 12 (no. 494).
41. WA, 47:698, 2; 695, 2 (1531).
42. "Ich hab mehr gelesen, denn sie meinen." WA, 50:519, 27-28.
43. "Unde b. Bernardus sermone de adventu istum versum aliis verbis sic exprimit: 'O felix anima, que [=quae] in conspectu Dei seipsam semper iudicat et accusat. Si enim nos ipsos iudicaremus, non utique a Deo iudicaremur.'" WA, 4:198, 19-21.
44. "Diligit enim animam, quae in conspectu eius et sine intermissione considerat, et sine dissimulatione diiudicat semetipsam. Idque iudicium non nisi propter nos a nobis exigit, quia si nos-etipsos iudicaverimus, non utique iudicabimur." *Opera*, IV:181, 4-7.
45. "Dignum est, fratres, ut tota devotione Domini celebretis adventum, delectati tanta consolatione, stupefacti tanta dignatione, inflammati tanta dilectione." *Opera*, IV:182, 3-5.
46. "Ita ut recte B. Bernardus dixerit, quod delicata est consolatio divina et non datur admittendibus alienam." WA, 4:331, 14-15. See Luther's German version in WA, 8:143, 34-36.
47. Tauler: "gottlicher trost sol sin also zart, das er in keine wise gestot do man andern trost enphohet." See Martin Treu, "Die Bedeutung der consolatio für Luthers Seelsorge bis 1525," *Lutherjahrbuch*, 53 (1986), p. 12.
48. See *Sermo 9 (Qui Habitat)*, which contains a passage with the content under discussion here: "consolationes eius laetificabunt animam tuam, dummodo non ad alia convertaris." *Opera*, IV:440, 14-18. It could also be that Luther had the similar saying

y in mind (attributed to Bernard by his disciple Gaufried) in the Pseudo-Bernardine *Declamationes de Colloquio Simonis cum Jesu* (55, 66). The latter has the following wording: "Per manna, quod habebat omnem suavitatem saporis, spiritualis consolatio designatur, quae iuxta verbum Bernardi delicata est nec datur admittendibus alienam," as quoted by the spiritual master of the Windesheim Congregation; cf. Heinrich Gleumes, "Gerhard Groot und die Windesheimer als Verehrer des hl. Bernhard von Clairvaux," *Zeitschrift für Ascese und Mystik*, 10 (1935), p. 108, note 62. The last three words in the Pseudo-Bernardine text show up verbatim in Luther's Latin version in the *Dictata*, and they are close to the German text of Tauler as well as to the German text of Luther. Apparently the Pseudo-Bernardine text fits best as Luther's source.

49. See Theo Bell, "Sermon von der Geburt Christi. Bernard van Clairvaux en Johann Tauler in Luther's Kerstpreek van 1520," *Bijdragen*, 39 (1978), pp. 289-309.
50. "Et hanc distinctionem Bernardus in Canticis pulchre ponit." *WA*, 4:134, 6-7. The index in *WA* 63 mistakenly gives sermon 69, 2 on the Canticle as Luther's source. The indicated passage in sermon 69, 2 is so vague that it cannot qualify as the text which Luther had in mind, when he referred to Bernard's "distinction" as to the coming of the Lord. Luther was simply mistaken here. The text which matches best is found in Bernard's Advent sermons, to which Luther referred explicitly elsewhere, so that one is on the right track in assuming that Luther meant to refer, not to the sermons on the Canticle, but to those on Advent.
51. See *Opera*, IV:177, 17-187, 2 (sermon 3).
52. See Sermon 5, *Opera*, IV:188, 2-189, 2.
53. See Sermon 6, *Opera*, IV:192, 25-193, 1.
54. See Sermon 7, *Opera*, IV:196, 9-14.
55. See note 50 above.
56. "Quia facies Christi est triplex. . .Secundo in adventu spirituali, sine quo primus nihil prodest." *WA*, 4:147, 10-20.
57. See *WA*, 4:331, 14-15, as mentioned above.
58. *WA*, 56:438, 20-21.
59. *WA*, 56: 437-438; cf. *LW*, 25: 430.
60. *Ibid.*

61. See F. Posset, "*Bernardus Redivivus: The Wirkungsgeschichte of a Medieval Sermon in the Reformation of the Sixteenth Century*," especially pp. 242-244.
62. Sermon 1, *Opera*, IV:162, 13-163, 2.
63. WA, 20:334, 8-335, 2 (1526). On Christ as a "worm," see Kenneth Hagen, "The Testament of a Worm: Luther on Testament and Covenant," *Consensus*, 8:1 (1982), pp. 12-20.
64. WA, 37: 235, 10, with footnote 6 (1533).
65. WA, 37:235, 10-22 (1533).
66. See *Opera*, V: 262-274.
67. WA, 41:486, 13-28 (1535). See also WA, 46:625, 1-626, 30 (1537); and in the lectures on Genesis WA, 42: 4-5; WA, 43:319, 16-22; WA, 43:580, 42-582, 16.
68. As to Bernardine source material in Luther's works after 1535, see my forthcoming article "The Elder Luther on Bernard," *The American Benedictine Review*.
69. From the list of Luther's unidentified references to Bernard in the index of WA, 63: 97-98, the following references still remain obscure: WA, 48: 274. WA, 1: 49, 38; 50, 4; 473, 6. WA, 4: 681, 10; WA, 25: 428, 5. WA, 55, I: 110, 13. WA, 37: 383, 32; WA, 41: 749, 39. WA, 5: 399, 30. WA, 36: 205, 5 and 7. WA, 59: 290, 39; 510, 2387; 522, 2776; 538, 3273. WA, 49: 389, 32. WA, 60: 188, 26.
70. See W. Standford Reid, "The Reformer Saint and the Saintly Reformer. Calvin and the Legacy of Bernard of Clairvaux," *Christian History*, VIII (1989), p. 28.